

## Writer's Block

I sit at my desk staring out of the window at the row of neat semi-detached houses in the next street and sigh. What an impossible task, writing on the theme of twenty!

What is the significance of twenty out in the world? It's just a number like any other so what is there to write about. Perhaps I should think of things that come in twenties, if there are any.

Well actually, having looked it up, twenty is a significant number. It is the foundation of the vigesimal counting system used by several ancient civilisations, including the Maya, based on the number of fingers and toes on the human body. It is still in use today in some parts of the world. Quite fascinating but not sure how you could make a short story about that unless it is just my poverty of imagination.

Blimey, it's tough. What about twenty pounds? That could be a significant sum of money, well not significant in terms of value but in terms of what it could buy. For many years it was the budget our family set per person for Christmas presents to keep things from getting out of hand financially but that is pretty dull for anyone else to hear about. Twenty quid is also a score or apparently a Bobby Moore in some parts of London or if you're Danny Dyer. Again Dullsville. Twenty quid is what it used to cost for a wrap of heroin in the Kings Cross area in the days before gentrification. More interesting but people may wonder how I know that. Obviously I just read it but even so, probably not really suitable material.

So, thinking outside the box a bit more, there are years with twenty in them like 1920 or 2020. I looked up 1920 and quite a lot happened in Britain. There were protests by the suffragettes and the miners and the Communist Party of Great Britain was formed. The main thing though was rioting and violence in Northern Ireland culminating in Bloody Sunday in Dublin in October. Could be a good theme but a bit expansive for 800 words and I don't know anything about it. Besides for 1920 to be a theme I'd have to write about more than one thing that happened in that year and how could I get that to fit the word count?

Likewise, 2020 was the year of the pandemic, rich and fertile ground for writers but so much has been written on it already, what could I possibly add of note within a couple of pages?

What else, what else? There is the age twenty I guess which is potentially an interesting one. You are no longer a teenager but not quite a fully-fledged adult either. Before 1970 you weren't officially an adult until twenty-one and still aren't in some parts of America, at least when it comes to drinking alcohol. I could flesh that out a bit, what it feels like to be an inbetweeners on the cusp of adulthood but might be a bit tough as it's so long ago for me I can't really remember much about it.

How about pop music, the Top 20, that could be an interesting topic, though actually, thinking about it wasn't it more the Top 40? Think the Top 20 was just a sub-set of that so probably not quite the ticket. Having said that, quite a few artists have had 20 Golden Greats albums, the Beach Boys, The Hollies, Nat King Cole and probably more..... nah, still not really right for a short story.

A bit more research tells me that the number twenty has biblical significance. It appears 282 times in the Old Testament (only 12 times in the New Testament) conveying the meaning of a complete or perfect waiting period. Poor Jacob had to wait 20 years to marry Rachel, working all that time for her father, only to be sent back to the land of Canaan by God at the end. A great

story but it has already been told and I don't want to plagiarise. I'm not sure where the other 280 odd mentions of twenty are but I don't fancy reading the whole of the Old Testament to find out.

So all in all I am faced with an impossible task on this twenty theme. I'm just going to have to come clean and say that I had writer's block, couldn't think of anything at all. Twenty is a lousy subject and I've come up with quite a few reasons why. In fact, let me count them up. Yes, of course, there are twenty.

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